
Gastroenteritis - amoebiasis

Summary

- Amoebiasis is a cause of diarrhoea among travellers to developing countries.
 - Proper handwashing helps prevent the spread of amoebiasis.
 - When travelling overseas, especially to developing countries, remember to 'cook it, peel it or leave it'.
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Gastroenteritis (gastro) can be a problem for travellers to countries with poor sanitation. Amoebiasis, a type of gastro, is a cause of diarrhoea among travellers to developing countries. It is caused by a parasite known as *Entamoeba histolytica* that infects the bowel. Amoebiasis most commonly affects young to middle-aged adults.

Proper handwashing helps prevent the spread of amoebiasis. When travelling overseas, especially to developing countries, remember to 'cook it, peel it or leave it'.

Symptoms of amoebiasis

Signs and symptoms include:

- diarrhoea (which may contain blood)
- stomach cramps
- fever.

Amoebiasis can also cause abscesses elsewhere in the body, such as the liver.

After you are infected with amoebiasis it may take days, months or years before you become ill. However, the illness usually develops two to four weeks after infection.

Causes of amoebiasis

Amoebiasis occurs when the parasites or their eggs (cysts) are taken in by mouth. People with amoebiasis have *Entamoeba histolytica* parasites in their faeces (poo). The infection can spread when infected people do not dispose of their faeces in a sanitary manner or do not wash their hands properly after going to the toilet.

Contaminated hands can then spread the parasites to food that may be eaten by other people and surfaces that may be touched by other people. Hands can also become contaminated when changing the nappies of an infected infant.

Amoebiasis can also be spread by:

- drinking contaminated water
- eating contaminated raw vegetables and fruit
- unprotected oral-anal sexual contact.

Some people carry the parasite or cysts in their faeces without having symptoms, but they can still pass the disease on to other people.

If you develop gastroenteritis

If you develop gastro after returning home from overseas, contact your doctor. They may arrange for a stool (faeces) sample to be tested. If the results show that you have amoebiasis, your doctor will provide appropriate advice and treatment.

You may need to take time off work until the symptoms stop. People with amoebiasis must not attend school or

children's services until the diarrhoea has ceased. If you are a food handler or healthcare worker, it is recommended that you do not attend work until the diarrhoea has ceased.

Prevention of amoebiasis

To help prevent the spread of amoebiasis around the home:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and hot running water for at least 15 seconds after using the toilet or changing a nappy.
- Clean bathrooms and toilets often. Pay particular attention to toilet seats and taps.
- Avoid sharing towels or face washers.

When preparing food, food handlers are advised to make sure that:

- hands are thoroughly washed with soap and hot running water before touching food. Use paper towel or an air dryer to dry hands
- raw vegetables are thoroughly washed and cooked
- the internal temperature of reheated food reaches at least 75 °C
- microwaves are used according to the manufacturer's instructions.

When travelling and visiting developing countries:

- Avoid eating uncooked foods, particularly vegetables and fruit which cannot be peeled before eating.
- Drink only packaged drinks, boiled water or chlorinated and filtered water.
- Avoid drinks containing ice.
- Remember, 'cook it, peel it or leave it'.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **NURSE-ON-CALL** Tel. **1300 606 024** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Your local council health department
- **Communicable Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit, Department of Health and Human Services**, Victorian Government Tel. **1300 651 160**

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Department of Health and Human Services - RHP&R - Health Protection - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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